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SUBJECT: CIVIL SOCIETY LEADER CRITICIZES USG POLICY, CALLS
FOR GREATER SUPPORT

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. A prominent civil society leader and former minister of social affairs privately criticized the USG's decision to suspend non-humanitarian aid during a January 7 meeting with Poloff. She blamed the international community for Guinea's current situation and called for greater assistance in the months ahead in order to reinforce civil society's capacity to pressure the military junta for a rapid return to civilian rule. Although contact favorably viewed the Council for Democracy and Development (CNDD), she was equally convinced that civil society needs to take a stronger, more unified position, and that it needs to do so sooner rather than later. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) On January 7, Poloff met with Hadja Saran Daraba, a former minister of social affairs and current head of the Guinea chapter of the Mano River Women's Union for Peace NGO (REFMAP). Daraba is also a member of the "Club des Femmes," an association of prominent women leaders with whom the Embassy has collaborated with in the past, and a member of the executive board of the National Council of Civil Society Organizations. Daraba was departing later that day for the January 10 ECOWAS meeting in Abuja.

WHY ARE YOU SANCTIONING US NOW?

¶3. (SBU) Known for her straightforward style, Daraba quickly launched into a twenty minute criticism of the USG's January 6 announcement to suspend non-humanitarian aid. "We are perplexed as to why the United States is taking this action now," she said. According to Diallo, the USG and other partners are responsible for the military's December 23 seizure of power. She said that she and others had been emphasizing to the international community, at least since 2003, the overwhelmingly disastrous long-term effects of continued weak governance. "You should have sanctioned the previous government," she said, adding "if you had, we would not be in this situation today."

¶4. (SBU) Daraba pointed out that when Guinea was under constitutional rule, the military used their weapons to intimidate the population. "We had a police state before...but it is the same military now; nothing has changed, but now we get sanctioned?" Warming to her theme, she said "how do you expect us to confront them...we have no means to fight them...you are asking for a civil war and a humanitarian crisis."

THE BLAME BELONGS TO YOU TOO

¶5. (SBU) Daraba criticized the USG for failing to provide "consistent assistance" to key civil society organizations such as REFMAP. She recounted how REFMAP had requested

funding through USAID's Faisons Ensemble program to reinforce civil society in Upper Guinea and the Forest Region. According to Daraba, the grant was eliminated from the program. "I cite this example because it is the one I know best," she said. Daraba maintained that if REFMAP and other NGOs like it had been supported consistently over the years, they might have been able to build the kind of grassroots level of civic responsibility that could have forced the government to change.

¶6. (SBU) Accusing the international community of propping up an ineffective government, Daraba agreed that a coup was not the best solution, but pointed out that the population is generally happy with the result. She emphasized that although the military had seized power, they had done so without shedding blood and had refrained from arresting people. When Poloff pointed out that the CNDD had arrested 18 individuals, Daraba agreed, but then quickly moved on. "Where was everybody five years ago when the population was too afraid to act?, she asked, adding "no government made any declaration to cut aid then."

THE CNDD IS DOING THE RIGHT THINGS

¶7. (SBU) According to Daraba, there are two positive aspects to the CNDD's methods. She said that the CNDD has refrained from threatening "most people," referring to former government officials. Second, Daraba said that the CNDD is clearly open to broad-based dialogue. "I don't see any mastery or expertise, but there is a willingness to work

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together," she told Poloff. Citing an example, Daraba mentioned the CNDD's seemingly frequent backtracking on public declarations, which she saw as a positive sign. "Every time they change something, it shows that they are listening to us," she said.

BUILDING CONSENSUS AMONG CIVIL SOCIETY

¶8. (SBU) In response to a question about civil society's perspective on the transition period, Daraba said that she was working with other civil society leaders to try and build a consensus of opinion. She noted that most everyone agrees that the total period of transition should not exceed one year, and that she and others are "mobilizing everyone," including the media, in an effort to pressure the CNDD to move in that direction.

¶9. (SBU) Commenting on elections, Daraba said that people "cannot afford to dream about how the process works." She noted that it is a step by step process and cannot be rushed. Daraba maintained that it is technically impossible to have elections in less than nine months. "This is where we are going to need your help," she told Poloff. She said that both technical and financial assistance to the electoral process will be critical, and without it, the elections will not happen.

¶10. (SBU) Poloff emphasized that civil society must immediately take a prominent leadership role that reflects a unity of opinion, noting that a failure to do so could ultimately reinforce the military's hold on power for the long-term. Daraba agreed, saying "we cannot wait; we have to act now." However, she said that if civil society is to effectively play this role, it must have financial support. She commented "I am not among the poorest of Guineans, but I have the barest minimum to survive...and I am responsible for paying 28 other people, representing 28 families."

¶11. (SBU) In response to Poloff comments that civil society's reaction appears to be much the same as it was

before Conte's death with a number of leaders playing to personal ambitions at the expense of the greater good, Daraba said "please keep saying these things to everyone you see...even if they deny it, you need to keep saying it...if a Guinean says it, no one will listen, but when you say it, it carries weight." She added that it is important that the USG and others start making these statements public in order to reinforce the message that unity and an aggressive approach are the key to restoring civilian rule.

COMMENT

¶12. (SBU) Despite Daraba's long-winded and pointed criticism of USG policy towards Guinea, the meeting was constructive and cordial. Poloff accepted the criticism and encouraged Daraba to focus on what needs to be done in the months ahead, noting that the USG shares her main objective: a quick restoration of civilian rule. Unlike some other civil society leaders, Daraba seemed to understand the urgency of taking a strong, proactive approach in order to firmly establish civil society's ability to serve as a political counterweight to the military junta. At the same time, she was clearly concerned about financial resources. When invited to speak at the Embassy's next scheduled Human Rights Working Group, which will focus on civil society's role in a representative democracy, Daraba was willing to participate and suggested other potential speakers. However, she warned that civil society needs much more than a two-hour discussion to get things on track. END COMMENT.
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